

No matter what's happened before, I can do better." That would be the best thing that ever happened to this country, if all of you believe that and acted on it. And I'm just trying to create an environment where it's true enough so that all of you can believe it.

Are we done?

Principal Poles. Thank you, Mr. President. This concludes our question-and-answer series.

The President. Thank you. You guys have been great. Good luck. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to Carlotta Harper, president, student government association.

Remarks Announcing the End of the Trade Embargo on Vietnam and an Exchange With Reporters

February 3, 1994

The President. Thank you very much. I want to especially thank all of you who have come here on such short notice. From the beginning of my administration, I have said that any decisions about our relationships with Vietnam should be guided by one factor and one factor only: gaining the fullest possible accounting for our prisoners of war and our missing in action. We owe that to all who served in Vietnam and to the families of those whose fate remains unknown.

Today I am lifting the trade embargo against Vietnam because I am absolutely convinced it offers the best way to resolve the fate of those who remain missing and about whom we are not sure. We've worked hard over the last year to achieve progress. On Memorial Day, I pledged to declassify and make available virtually all Government documents related to our POW's and MIA. On Veterans Day, I announced that we had fulfilled that pledge. Last April, and again in July, I sent two Presidential delegations to Vietnam to expand our search for remains and documents. We intensified our diplomatic efforts. We have devoted more resources to this effort than any previous administration. Today, more than 500 dedi-

cated military and civilian personnel are involved in this effort under the leadership of General Shalikashvili, Secretary Aspin, and our Commander in the Pacific, Admiral Larson. Many work daily in the fields, the jungles, the mountains of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, often braving very dangerous conditions, trying to find the truth about those about whom we are not sure.

Last July, I said any improvement in our relations with Vietnam would depend on tangible progress in four specific areas: first, the recovery and return of remains of our POW's and MIA; second, the continued resolution of discrepancy cases, cases in which there is reason to believe individuals could have survived the incident in which they were lost; third, further assistance from Vietnam and Laos on investigations along their common border, an area where many U.S. servicemen were lost and pilots downed; and fourth, accelerated efforts to provide all relevant POW/MIA-related documents.

Today, I can report that significant, tangible progress has been made in all these four areas. Let me describe it. First, on remains: Since the beginning of this administration, we have recovered the remains of 67 American servicemen. In the 7 months since July, we've recovered 39 sets of remains, more than during all of 1992. Second, on the discrepancy cases: Since the beginning of the administration, we've reduced the number of these cases from 135 to 73. Since last July, we've confirmed the deaths of 19 servicemen who were on the list. A special United States team in Vietnam continues to investigate the remaining cases. Third, on cooperation with Laos: As a direct result of the conditions set out in July, the Governments of Vietnam and Laos agreed to work with us to investigate their common border. The first such investigation took place in December and located new remains as well as crash sites that will soon be excavated. Fourth, on the documents: Since July, we have received important wartime documents from Vietnam's military archives that provide leads on unresolved POW/MIA cases. The progress achieved on unresolved questions is encouraging, but it must not end here. I remain personally committed to continuing the

search for the answers and the peace of mind that families of the missing deserve.

There's been a substantial increase in Vietnamese cooperation on these matters over the past year. Everyone involved in the issue has affirmed that. I have carefully considered the question of how best to sustain that cooperation in securing the fullest possible accounting. I've consulted with my national security and veterans affairs advisers, with several outside experts, such as General John Vessey, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who has been an emissary to Vietnam for three Presidents now. It was their view that the key to continued progress lies in expanding our contacts with Vietnam.

This was also the view of many distinguished Vietnam veterans and former POW's who now serve in the Congress, such as Senator Bob Kerrey and Congressman Pete Peterson, who are here. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Senator John Kerry—is he here? There he is. He just came in—and Senator John McCain, who had to go home on a family matter and could not be here. But I thank the two of you so much for your leadership and your steadfastness and all the rest of you, Senator Robb and so many others, especially those who served in Vietnam, for being counted on this issue and for taking all the care you have for such a long time.

I have made the judgment that the best way to ensure cooperation from Vietnam and to continue getting the information Americans want on POW's and MIA's is to end the trade embargo. I've also decided to establish a liaison office in Vietnam to provide services for Americans there and help us to pursue a human rights dialog with the Vietnamese Government.

I want to be clear: These actions do not constitute a normalization of our relationships. Before that happens, we must have more progress, more cooperation, and more answers. Toward that end, this spring I will send another high-level U.S. delegation to Vietnam to continue the search for remains and for documents.

Earlier today, I met with the leaders of our Nation's veterans organizations. I deeply respect their views. Many of the families they represent have endured enormous suffering

and uncertainty. And their opinions also deserve special consideration. I talked with them about my decision. I explained the reasons for that decision. Some of them, in all candor, do not agree with the action I am taking today. But I believe we all agree on the ultimate goal: to secure the fullest possible accounting of those who remain missing. And I was pleased that they committed to continue working with us toward that goal.

Whatever the Vietnam war may have done in dividing our country in the past, today our Nation is one in honoring those who served and pressing for answers about all those who did not return. This decision today, I believe, renews that commitment and our constant, constant effort never to forget those until our job is done. Those who have sacrificed deserve a full and final accounting. I am absolutely convinced, as are so many in the Congress who served there and so many Americans who have studied this issue, that this decision today will help to ensure that fullest possible accounting.

Thank you very much.

POW's/MIA's

Q. Mr. President, aren't you giving up some leverage, though? Could we ask about that? And what do you anticipate in terms of American trade? What's the size of the market? What do you think the opportunities are?

The President. I have no idea. I wanted to make sure that the trade questions did not enter into this decision. I never had a briefing on it, and we never had a discussion about it. I thought it was very important that that not be a part of this decision.

I don't think we're giving up anything. It was the consensus of all those who had been there, who had worked there that we had gotten so much more cooperation that we needed to keep moving the process forward and that we would lose leverage if there were no forward movement. Have we given up anything? I don't think so. Nothing we are doing today is irreversible if the cooperation ceases. So I am convinced we are moving in the right direction for the right reasons.

Vietnam Veterans

Q. Mr. President, you mentioned people who had been to Vietnam, had served; you did not. Did this have any role in your decision, and did it make it more difficult for you to reach this decision?

The President. No. I do think, however, everybody my age, whether they were in Vietnam or not, knew someone who died there, knew someone who was wounded there. And I think people in our generation are perhaps more insistent on trying to get a full accounting, more obsessed with it than perhaps people who are younger and people who are older, except those who had children there. I think that was the only thing.

I have spent an enormous amount of time on this issue. I got a personal briefing when I was in Hawaii last summer. I have talked to some of the young people who were there digging in the jungles for the remains. I have really thought about this, and I have tried to listen hard to—when Senator Kerry and Senator McCain and their delegation came back, we had a long meeting here about it. I think the people, all the people my age just want to know we've done everything we can. And I think this is consistent with doing that.

Immigration

Q. Mr. President, on another subject, what do you hope to achieve with the immigration crackdown that was announced today? And do you have any concerns that people's rights will be violated?

The President. Well, we're going to do our best not to violate anybody's rights. What we hope to achieve is a continued environment in which America will be open for legal immigration. We are a nation of immigrants—which we can do our best to protect our borders.

Health Care Plan

Q. You've had, sir, two influential business groups say that they prefer other plans than yours to health care. Does that hurt you?

The President. One was the Chamber of Commerce.

Q. Does their stand, saying that other directions are the way to go, particularly the Business Roundtable, does that hurt you in negotiations as you move forward?

The President. I don't want to make too much of it, because the people who came in here to see me said it was a negotiating strategy. And I said, well, if all of you are providing health care coverage to your employees, I don't think you want to come out for a position against providing guaranteed health insurance to all American workers. So I don't know what to make of it, but I wouldn't read too much into it. This is the beginning of what will be a protracted legislative discussion.

Former President Ronald Reagan

Q. Tonight, sir, Ronald Reagan is apparently going to take issue with some of your criticisms of him. Do you feel that you have been unfairly savaging his record in the 1980's?

The President. Gee, I don't think I've been very critical of him at all. You know, I disagreed with the economic policy, I said so. I think if you go back over the rhetoric of this last year, it's been fairly free of obsession with the past, I'm not much into that. I'm looking toward tomorrow.

Q. You hired Gergen, after all. [Laughter]

The President. What greater compliment could I pay President Reagan?

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:06 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Executive Order 12896—Amending the Civil Service Rules Concerning Political Activity

February 3, 1994

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including sections 3301 and 3302 of title 5, United States Code, and as a result of the enactment of Public Law 103-94, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. Civil Service Rule IV (5 CFR Part 4) is amended by revoking section 4.1.

Sec. 2. This order is effective on February 3, 1994.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
February 3, 1994.